

# E&E TV

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## **ENERGY POLICY: Rep. Roscoe Bartlett (R-Md.) discusses fuel economy, peak oil and Tom DeLay**

House lawmakers plan to move forward with legislation this week to increase oil and gas supplies, with measures that would expand the nation's refining capacity and open up new offshore areas to natural gas exploration. But some House members, including Rep. Roscoe Bartlett (R-Md.), say the auto industry needs to do its part as well. During today's OnPoint, Bartlett explains why his bill to boost fuel economy standards could see more support in Congress this time around, and how the indictment of House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas) might affect the Republican agenda on Capitol Hill. Plus, Bartlett describes a recent conference he held on peak oil, and his own attempts to educate President Bush on that subject. *This episode of OnPoint taped on September 28, 2005.*

### Transcript

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**Brian Stempeck:** Hello and welcome to OnPoint. I'm Brian Stempeck. Joining us today is Congressman Roscoe Bartlett, Republican of Maryland. Also with us is Colin Sullivan, editor of *Environment & Energy Daily*. Congressman thanks a lot for being here.

**Roscoe Bartlett:** Happy to be on thank you.

**Brian Stempeck:** You have a new fuel economy bill. We're going to get that in a minute. I want to start off though with the big news today. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay was indicted today. You have a new majority leader, Roy Blunt, after DeLay has stepped aside for now. I want to get your thoughts on what this means for the agenda of the Republican Party, specifically looking at what this means for energy legislation.

**Roscoe Bartlett:** First I'd like to note that an indictment is only an accusation. We live in a great free country where you're not guilty into a proven guilty in court, so at this point in time Tom DeLay is guilty of nothing. I don't think this will have any meaningful effect on our agenda. The two people who are picking up the reins for Tom DeLay, temporarily, are really good people and I think that things will go fine.

**Brian Stempeck:** Do you think it gives you a better shot at moving some of your own legislation, in terms of getting to some of the CAFE and fuel economy issues?

**Roscoe Bartlett:** Well, the chances of moving these things will certainly not be worse and I think perhaps better.

**Brian Stempeck:** Now what about the fact though that, right now it's a time of very high energy prices, high gasoline prices. We have the hurricane that just went through and a lot of people pointed the finger at Republicans and now you have DeLay. Does this say to you at all that the Republican Party might be in trouble with voters come 2006?

**Roscoe Bartlett:** Well, I believe that the average voter in this country has the same agenda for America that the majority of Republicans have. They want less government, less

regulations, less taxes and that's where we're going. I think that the Republicans are going to be returned to office.

**Colin Sullivan:** Now if we turn to 2006 again, today we had a quote from Representative Sam Farr, a Democrat from California, immediately after the indictment and DeLay stepping down. He's immediately seizing on it and saying the Republican Party has been too cozy with energy firms. Part of the allegations against Tom DeLay is that he took contributions from energy firms in Texas. Now do you feel like Democrats are going to exploit that advantage or do you think that might help them in 2006?

**Roscoe Bartlett:** I don't think that this will be a meaningful issue, 2006 is a long way time from now. This is more than a year, that's an eternity in politics. There will be many things more important in that election than this event today.

**Colin Sullivan:** What about in terms of aiding your effort on CAFE? Do you feel like Roy Blunt and David Dreier, or these other people that are now in the leadership, are more open to possibly corporate average fuel economy standards in the energy debate, which is supposed to hit the House floor next week?

**Roscoe Bartlett:** Well, I think that there is a move, in both houses of Congress, to be more receptive to the government playing a role here. In the past there were many people who felt that government shouldn't be involved in a process like this, that market forces ought to control. But I'll tell you there are two issues today that I think are pretty controlling. First is our far too much dependence on foreign oil. It's really a national security issue and the less foreign oil we used the better our national security. The second issue is that there are an increasing number of professionals in the world who believe we are probably facing, now or imminently, peak oil production in the world. That's the point at which the world will have reached its maximum capacity for producing oil. Then it will be kind of plateaued for a little and then inevitably start downhill and nothing we can do will reverse that. It happened in our country in 1970. It was predicted in 1956, that this would happen, and it's probably happening to the world now. So these are two very good reasons to enact higher CAFE standards.

**Colin Sullivan:** Now do you feel like the political reality of CAFE though is shifted in the wake of the hurricanes? I mean prior to this, members like John Dingell and Carl Levin in the Senate have sort of successfully blocked any sort of CAFE standards. So it's a pretty strong bipartisan coalition is my point, Democrats and Republicans against it. Do you feel like that calculus has changed and weakened? I mean have you done a vote count that said CAFE might be supported more readily now after the hurricanes than it was before?

**Roscoe Bartlett:** I don't think there's been an actual vote count, but I think that the general perception is that people are now much more tuned into energy prices than they were before. You know I'm not sure that we'll need much CAFE. I looked today at how long cars stay on the lot before they're sold. The poorer the gas mileage the longer they stay on the lot. The car which stays a lot the least amount of time is the Prius. The new one gets 51 miles per gallon. It stays on the lot an average of only six days and in many places there were long waiting lists. You know we're going to enact CAFE standards because it's the right thing to do, but the public may be ahead of us. They already understand it's the right thing to do and they're demonstrating that by what they're buying.

**Brian Stempeck:** Then why, I mean that's what a lot of opponents of CAFE would say, that the market itself is going to respond to this. And as you said a lot of the hybrid cars are

selling very well while the larger SUVs are not. I mean you just said it yourself, why the need for CAFE at all if the market is already responding and we're already seeing evidence of it?

**Roscoe Bartlett:** Well, I think one of the reasons for it is so that the citizens learn that their government really is responsive and is watching.

**Brian Stempeck:** Now tell us a little bit about your bill. It would basically raise standards to 33 miles per gallon, up from about 27.5 miles per gallon now. And some of the cosponsors are Chairman Boehlert of the Science Committee. Who else do you see as lining up for support of that bill?

**Roscoe Bartlett:** Well, I think an increasing number of people will be lining up for support of that bill. In the Senate, Domenici and Craig are both supporting it now. They weren't before. I think this is a new day, a new world. And one of the things that's really new, I think, is the increasing recognition that we probably are facing an imminent energy shortage worldwide. And we are one person in 22 in the world, less than 5 percent of the world's population. We use 25 percent of the world's oil. We import two thirds of what we use, and I think that's dawning on people that maybe, just maybe this creates a national security risk.

**Colin Sullivan:** Are you disappointed with your Republican agenda on energy over the last five years? I mean you just passed an energy bill out two months ago and already we're seeing people saying that energy bill had a shelf life of two months. You're doing another energy bill now, but still the bills that are going into the Resources Committee and the Energy and Commerce Committee don't do very much that's serious about conservation. Are you disappointed in that? Do you think Republicans, led by Pombo and Barton, have been sort of misled down a path that doesn't work?

**Roscoe Bartlett:** Well you know, we have representative government and many times the elected officials kind of lag of the general public and I think that's the case now. The general public is telling us, by the cars that they're buying, that they want to move to more fuel efficient cars and that's where the Congress ought to be. I voted against the energy bill. The president wanted 60 some percent of all of the R&D to go to renewables. I think he got 6 percent. My big concern was that we do a big bill like that only every four or five or six years and once we've done that bill then we turn our attention to other issues. I'm glad we're coming back to energy. I hope that the two bills coming out will be bills I can vote for. I'm not sure.

**Colin Sullivan:** What do you think about this process? I mean they're moving these bills through pretty fast and a lot of this stuff was left on the cutting room floor less than two months ago when they passed an energy bill. Isn't it just a, I mean a lot of people say that it's just an excuse for Joe Barton to move some refinery language that he couldn't move before. What do you think of that?

**Roscoe Bartlett:** You know it would be awfully nice if we had more refineries today because they're operating at 97 percent capacity. It doesn't leave much slack if you have a hurricane or something, which we just did. Fortunately we're importing refined product now or we'd really have problems at the pump. I'm not sure if building new refineries is going to be necessary because I think by the time it would be built and online we'll be over the peak of oil production and sliding down the other side of Hubbard's Peak and I doubt that they'll be needed.

**Brian Stempeck:** Now House Resources Committee Chairman Pombo is also working on a bill himself to open up ANWR, to open up the outer continental shelf to energy exploration. What do you think of those efforts? I mean in the past almost, about a month ago you wrote a letter saying that you didn't want to see ANWR in the budget bill. Is that enough to get you to oppose these kinds of bills?

**Roscoe Bartlett:** Well I'm not going to vote for drilling in either one of these places and my reason is that if you have only 2 percent of the known reserves of oil and use 25 percent of the world's oil and import two thirds of what you use, I'm having a hard time understanding how it's in our national security interest to use up the little bit of oil we have as quickly as possible. If we could pump ANWR and the offshore oil tomorrow, what would we do the day after tomorrow? This may be a rainy day. I think is going to be a rainier day. It's like money in the bank and money that's going to yield a big interest rate. Let's just leave it there.

**Brian Stempeck:** Now what about if something like ANWR was paired with a CAFE increase? That Senator Domenici says well, we want to open up the outer shelf, we want to have ANWR and we're willing to, on the other side, do something on conservation with CAFE. Is that a deal you'd be willing to make?

**Roscoe Bartlett:** You know, many of these bills have good points and bad points and you're voting on the balance. I haven't seen the bills. I don't know what the balance will be. I'll have to wait and see.

**Colin Sullivan:** Now it is going to be in the budget reconciliation and the budget obviously has other problems. Do you feel like the budget's going to go through? Do you think that the best hope for environmentalists opposed to ANWR is that the budget gets sunk on other issues not related to ANWR?

**Roscoe Bartlett:** You know, I've been here 13 years now and I've noticed that every time we do something very quickly we do something not very well. We need to just stop, take a deep breath and reflect on these things before we, you know, this is just, it's too soon. It's too soon. After 9/11, too soon, we passed the Patriot Act and I just don't like doing things as quickly as we're doing them now.

**Colin Sullivan:** What about something like a higher federal gasoline tax? Right now you're seeing more conservation throughout the country, partially because gas prices are so high. Some people would support a higher federal gasoline tax. Is that something you would support or is that a bad idea?

**Roscoe Bartlett:** Something that really saddens me is when I see, in my district, kerosene, \$2.65 a gallon. And I remember those low income people that I see carrying one or two gallons of kerosene for their little kerosene heater, to keep themselves warm in their apartment. Their fuel bills are going up almost 3 times what they were just a couple of years ago. Higher fuel prices would reduce the demand, that's very good, but they would also be very hurtful for the people that we can least afford to hurt in our society and that is poor people. Unfortunately we do not have any meaningful mass transit system in our country. They have no recourse but to ride in their cars. This is really kind of a too bad if you do it and too bad if you don't it kind of thing. On the one hand, higher prices would reduce the demand for fuel, that's good. On the other hand it would really hurt poor people. Where do you come down on this?

**Brian Stempeck:** Congressman, I want to turn to the question of peak oil, which you mentioned just a little while ago. Earlier this week you actually held a conference in your district and had a number of kind of renowned experts talking about the subject of peak oil. You had Matthew Simmons, Kenneth Deffeyes, people like that, tell us what you heard from these experts and is that message getting through to the general public?

**Roscoe Bartlett:** We hope so. I've given six floor speeches in the House and we had this conference. I was very honored. These are experts from around the world, some of the best experts in the world, and they came here, very honored. We had about 300 people turn out for the conference. It really went very well. I hope the message is getting out. We're right now in the mode of getting the message out and as soon as enough of the American people know there is a problem there will be solutions. After all we have a very resourceful, bright public, they just need to know there's a problem and they'll bring solutions.

**Brian Stempeck:** Now one of the questions that was asked at the conference, which I thought was interesting was have you spoken with President Bush about this and if so what's his reaction been to the question of peak oil?

**Roscoe Bartlett:** I did speak with the president. I think he understands it, but I'll tell you what's happening is a really good example of the tyranny of the urgent. The urgent always takes precedence over the important, whether we would like it to or not. And the urgent thing today is down there in the gulf and he's been there a number of times and not just weeks the important things off the table. I hope the important things get back on the table. And dealing with the coming energy shortage is a really important thing.

**Colin Sullivan:** Well with that in mind, one last question, do you expect to see an energy bill coming out of Congress this year? I mean something that would be another conference report that can not only get through the House, but can also get through the Senate. Do you think we'll see it this year?

**Roscoe Bartlett:** I think there'll be something called an energy bill. I hope that it's not just restricted to let's drill offshore and soften some of the environmental constraints and so forth and drill in ANWR. If that's all it is I can't vote for it for the reason I stated. If you have only 2 percent of the known reserves of oil, I'm having a lot of trouble understanding how it's in our national security interest to use up the little bit we have as quickly as we can.

**Brian Stempeck:** Congressman we're out of time. Thanks a lot for being on the show today.

**Roscoe Bartlett:** Thank you.

**Brian Stempeck:** I'm Brian Stempeck. This is OnPoint. Thanks for watching.

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